



The President's Daily Brief

17 October 1973

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

17 October 1973

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Heavy fighting in Syria and an Israeli tank raid on the west bank of the canal have left battle lines relatively unchanged. President Sadat has put forward uncompromising terms for a cease-fire which, nevertheless, hint at some flexibility, but Prime Minister Meir says Tel Aviv will hold out for an Arab defeat on both fronts. (Page 1)

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The construction of new artillery positions near Guantanamo Bay raises the question of Cuban intentions toward the US base. (Page 4)

The Japanese regard the Soviet position on the Northern Territories issue following Tanaka's trip as a step forward, even though it entails only an agreement to discuss the question sometime next year. (Page 5)

As long as the King continues to play a prominent role in Thai affairs, there should be no major change in Bangkok's policy regarding relations with the US or the presence of US forces. (Page 6)

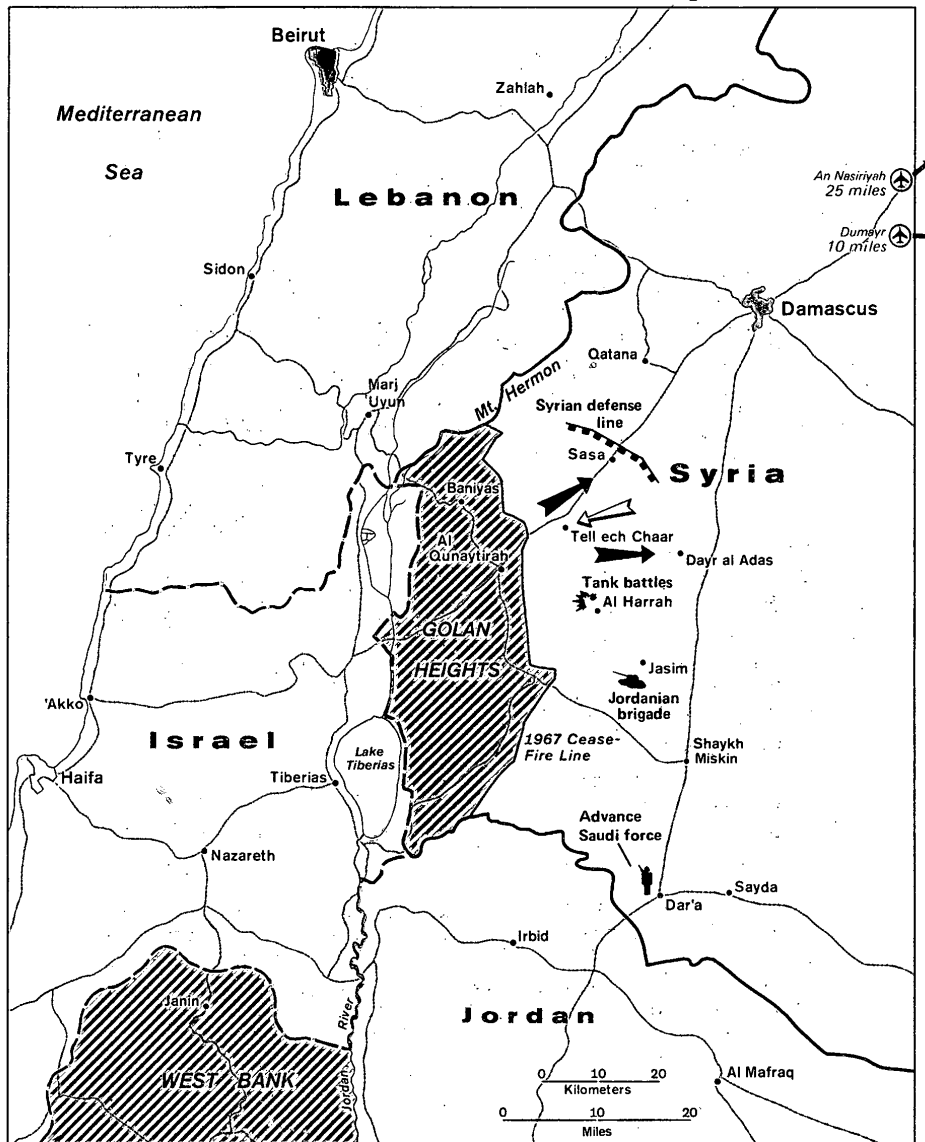
Most of the EC delegates to the meeting preparing for the Atlantic Declaration talks found the US proposal for a new form of consultation feasible, but the French may be delaying a consensus. (Page 7)

The prime ministers of Iceland and the UK have adopted a conditional agreement that could end the cod war, but ratification may be a problem in Reykjavik. (Page 8)

Saigon has found fresh evidence suggesting an imminent Communist attack in Tay Ninh Province. (Page 9)

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The Syrian Front



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ARAB STATES - ISRAEL,

An Israeli force of about 20 tanks crossed the Suez Canal north of the Great Bitter Lake early yesterday in an effort to destroy SAM and antiaircraft batteries. The Egyptians claim to have inflicted heavy losses on the Israeli force; an Israeli military spokesman said last night that he "would not want to interpret" the results of the cross-canal operation "as good tidings." The Israeli Air Force continues to pound targets around Port Said, and an air battle fought over the Great Bitter Lake cost the Egyptians two MIGs.

Heavy fighting on the Syrian front left the battle lines relatively unchanged. A combined Syrian and Iraqi force attacked Israeli positions at dawn yesterday, and the Israelis later retaliated with a counterattack. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Syrians may have driven a narrow salient into Israeli lines near Tell ech Chaar, overlooking the Qunaytirah-Damascus road. Syrian aircraft were also able to mount relatively heavy attacks on Israeli ground forces.

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Amman claims that the Jordanian 40th Armored Brigade engaged the Israelis yesterday but was forced back, primarily because adjoining Iraqi and Syrian troops failed to make any headway. The Jordanians admit to the loss of 12 tanks, with 17 damaged. [REDACTED]

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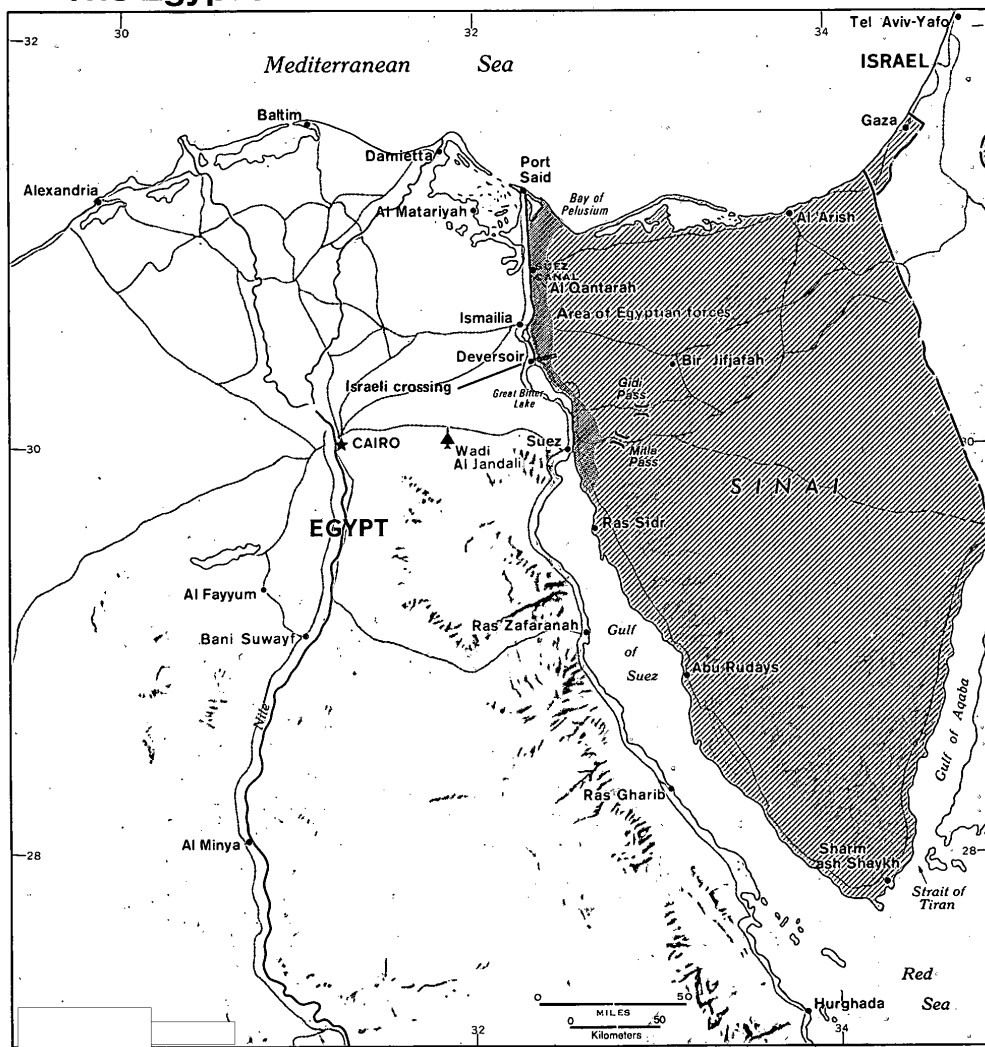
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President Sadat, speaking to a joint session of the People's Assembly and the Arab Socialist Union Central Committee yesterday, stated that Egypt will accept a cease-fire only when Israel has agreed to withdraw to the boundaries that existed before the 1967 war. His position contained slight hints of flexibility, however; his willingness to take part in an international peace conference if Israel withdraws and his repeated assurances that he does not seek Israel's annihilation suggest that he may accept some compromises later. His claim that Egyptian "rockets" are capable of striking any point in Israel, but that he is "aware of the responsibility of using certain types of arms," was presumably designed both to intimidate Tel Aviv and to dramatize Cairo's restraint.

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The Egyptian Front



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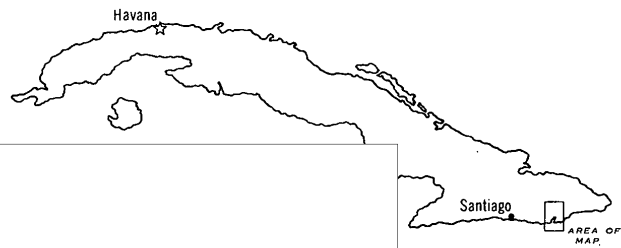
Prime Minister Meir subsequently said in a speech to the Knesset yesterday that Tel Aviv would never agree to a cease-fire predicated on an Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines. A cease-fire can only be accepted, she said, when the Arabs are defeated on both fronts. She also claimed not to believe that the Arab goal is limited to regaining territory lost in the last war, charging instead that "this is a war against our very existence as a state and a people."

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CUBA

The construction of new artillery positions near Guantanamo Bay raises the question of Cuban intentions toward the US Naval Base. This and other Cuban military developments, however, do not provide any specific indication that Fidel Castro is attempting to capitalize on US preoccupation with the Middle East conflict.

Some of the new artillery positions near Guantanamo Bay were in the initial stages of construction early last July. No artillery pieces, support equipment, or other military materiel have been seen at or near the new emplacements and no buildup is evident at any of the nearby military bases.

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Castro evidently does feel under pressure to show his support for the Arab war effort. A Cuban airliner left Havana for Libya last Saturday with 73 passengers. These could be members of a Cuban medical detachment similar to those Cuba has sent to North Vietnam, Algeria, and Guinea in the past. Such a token contribution to the Arab cause would presumably fulfill Foreign Minister Roa's pledge in the UN last week that Cuba will support the Arabs "with our blood."

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USSR-JAPAN

There were heated exchanges between General Secretary Brezhnev and Prime Minister Tanaka last week over the question of the Northern Territories. Only at the last minute were the two able to agree on a careful formulation in the communiqué that called for the "settlement of outstanding questions, left over since the time of the Second World War."

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[REDACTED]

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The Soviets apparently did not improve on an offer--made 17 years ago--that would return the two smaller islands to Japan while retaining the two major islands for Moscow. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the USSR could never give up all of the islands because of the impact this would have on the Soviet negotiating position with China.

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Although the communiqué did not specifically mention the Northern Territories, the Japanese Foreign Ministry considers it a significant step forward. The Japanese say Tanaka succeeded in getting a full and clear verbal statement from Brezhnev acknowledging that peace treaty problems include territorial matters. They thus can argue that Tanaka did not come away from Moscow empty-handed, even if he got only an agreement to discuss an issue on which the two sides are as far apart as ever.

The Soviets were similarly stubborn on other matters. The two sides reached an impasse on the issues of safe fishing for the Japanese in the waters around the disputed islands, return of Japanese fishermen detained by Moscow, and permission for Korean residents of the territories to move to Japan. The Soviets even refused to allow Japanese citizens to visit family gravesites on the two larger islands.

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THAILAND

The new cabinet met for the first time yesterday and announced amnesty for those who had taken part in the student demonstrations. It also agreed to appoint a committee to begin drafting a new constitution--one of the students' key demands. Prime Minister Sanya has pledged that the constitution will be in effect and elections held within six months.

King Phumiphon seems to be playing a pivotal role

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Ambassador Unger's view of Sanya as a man with little taste for participation in politics.

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The Ambassador says that Sanya shares the King's anti-Communist views and has in the past expressed sympathy with US objectives in Indochina. These factors suggest that as long as the King stays in command, there will be no major change in Thai policy regarding relations with the US or the presence of US forces in Thailand.

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EC-US

Most of the EC delegates to the meetings preparing for the Atlantic Declaration talks found the US proposal for a new "form" of consultation to be generally feasible, according to the US Mission in Brussels. The mission expects certain conditions to be presented to US officials, however, when the talks begin tomorrow. The EC insists that consultations be "genuinely" reciprocal, give the US no special rights not granted other countries, and not encroach on the autonomy of Community decision-making. Even if these conditions are accepted, it is not certain that the US proposal will be approved.

Another problem concerns the concept of partnership. The French object to the term and the concept, which, they feel, unduly emphasizes an Atlantic Community. While most of the other members do not share the French objections, they believe it better to go along with Paris for the present to avoid a protracted struggle in the EC.

A senior British official has meanwhile told the US Embassy in London that French "stickiness" is delaying an EC consensus on several matters, and that this could postpone any discussion of these points until the next round of talks.

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ICELAND-UK

Leaders of both countries have adopted a conditional agreement, subject to the approval of their governments, that offers some hope of ending the 14-month-old cod war.

Prime Ministers Johannesson and Heath met in London on October 15 and 16, ostensibly only to formalize the de facto truce that has been observed by both sides since the beginning of the month. Johannesson was not accompanied by representatives from the other two parties in his coalition--the Communists and the Liberal Left Organization--on the assumption that the talks would concern only details of the truce. The Communists are likely to object to Johannesson's end-run unless the agreement turns out to be extremely favorable to Iceland.

Initial press reports from Reykjavik indicate that the draft agreement involves limiting the size and number of British trawlers and confining them to specific fishing zones within the disputed 50-mile limit. The annual catch limit for the British, who had accepted a reduction to 145,000 tons before negotiations broke off in May, probably was reduced even more.

The two leaders apparently believe that permanent legislation concerning maritime jurisdiction should await the UN's Law of the Sea Conference that begins next year.

Unless the terms of the draft agreement are particularly hard on British fishermen, Parliament probably will ratify the arrangement without a fight. It may face tough sledding in Reykjavik, however, if the Communists use the occasion to try to generate massive protests.

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NOTE

South Vietnam: Saigon continues to accumulate evidence suggesting an early Communist attack in Tay Ninh Province. [redacted] claims that an attack is imminent, perhaps today or tomorrow. [redacted] Tay Ninh Province [redacted] has declared a full alert. [redacted] concerned that South Vietnamese troops in the area might be unable to hold against a Communist attack, but the Military Region III commander is confident he can cope.

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